11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
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populated country, the district under consideration is practically isolated, and communication with other parts of the country is carried on by road or by sea. Mails and passengers are carried daily to and from Ballina and Belmullet by a good two-horse (Bianconi) stage-car; and a similar vehicle, an opposition venture, also makes the journey daily with passengers and light goods. The country beyond Belmullet is provided with mails twice weekly. Goods are conveyed by carts from Ballina, a distance of over forty miles, during the winter and spring, and large sailing boats are sometimes employed carrying heavy goods from Westport. But few wheeled-vehicles are used except by the better-to-do, and in the remoter parts hardly any are employed, turf, sea-weed, &c., being carried in cleaves or pardoges (panniers with movable bottoms, slung over the backs of horses or donkeys). The people, if poor, have to walk; those better off may ride to market. It is common for two to ride the one horse, a man in the saddle and a woman *en croupe*, or both equestrians may be women, in which case, sometimes, but very rarely, the woman in front may ride astride.

The main roads are pretty good, but many of the smaller ones are very little used, except at harvest time or when turf is being got in, and as a result are grass-grown and uneven. Some small fishing hamlets and outlying places are still unprovided with roads.

For water transport there are the sailing boats before mentioned, used for the conveyance of goods from Westport. The form of boat most in use is the curragh, which is manned by three men; it varies somewhat in pattern in different localities.

In the Mullet and the islands 142 curraghs are in use. Very few boats of other patterns are kept, as there are only three second-class boats (yawls), and about thirty third-class. At Portacloy there are about 30 curraghs.

The southern part of the peninsula and the islands obtain their turf supply by boat from Achill and Ballycroy.

V.—FOLK-LORE.

Although poor in so many other respects, Erris is particularly rich in folk-lore, many old customs, traditions, and beliefs, which have died out, or are dying elsewhere, still flourishing there. The legends and tales of the past and many old songs are still current, especially among the older people, who, however, will not readily communicate them to strangers, so that only a resident well acquainted with Irish

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814 [609] is likely to succeed in collecting much. Fortunately there is a resident (the Rev. P. A. O'Reilly), who is engaged in collecting the old Irish songs of the district, several of which he has already published. As to the legends, many of these have been recorded by C. O. and Mr. Knight, to whose works the reader is referred.

The following notes, mainly dealing with what may be termed minor folk-lore, were some of them obtained from fishermen and others of the natives, but mainly through the kindness of several residents, some of whom desired that their names should not be mentioned.

115 814 1. *Customs and Beliefs.*—For the majority of the notes on these I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. J. A. Nolan, of Belmullet, who, being a native of the district, and personally acquainted with nearly everyone in it, has an exceptionally large knowledge of the subject; for a large part of what remains I have also to thank Messrs. F. C. Wallace, D.I. R.I.C., Belmullet, and P. T. O'Reilly, Carn.

777 A very large number of things are considered lucky or the reverse. It is unlucky to dig a grave on a Monday, on which day also no change of residence should be made, a Friday should rather be chosen, as that is the lucky day for moving. To meet a red-haired woman on starting out in the morning, to mention a priest while fishing, to take fish out of a house without sprinkling some salt on it, to sell milk without putting in a pinch of salt, to give fire out of the house on May-day, or to anyone in whose dwelling a sick person may be, all these are unlucky. People "born with teeth" [845] are unlucky also; but to be "born with a caul" is a sign of great good fortune, though should the original owner ever see it his luck will depart; the possession of a caul is believed to protect against death by drowning. A mole on the face, if "above the breath," is considered to have the same protective influence.

787 Death within the year is believed to be the fate of the man who has the temerity to make an addition to the western side of his house, or to build out at the back; several instances of men who died within a short time after thus offending are sure to be told to the incredulous.

The banshee, the death-watch, the creaking of furniture, and the howling of a dog at night are all looked upon as death-warnings. Several persons were met with who asserted that they had heard the banshee before the death of relatives.

585 At weddings the bride and bridegroom must step over the threshold of the chapel door together, as whichever goes out first will be the first to die.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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Figure 1. The back of the island from the lighthouse

with an Iron Age culture about 350 B.C.; but only in 1961 were earlier Neolithic, or possibly Mesolithic, implements discovered. When my wife and I arrived in the island for a seven week visit during the summer of 1962, we were presented with three slate axe heads which had been unearthed by road workers the previous December. It is possible that they are Mesolithic, for the industry never has been dated accurately.

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The principal Copper-Bronze Age monuments of Inis Beag are Megalithic tombs and burial mounds, and possibly kitchen middens and semi-subterranean stone dwellings, called *clochán*. Small gallery graves incorporated into lately built stone walls are common, but it appears that they never have been examined by prehistorians, for there is no record of them in the literature. Archeologists seldom have visited the back of the island where the prehistoric and medieval populations, contrary to present day opinion, may have centered. None of the Inis Beag *clochán* have been dated, but it is known that they were lived in by clerics and ascetics during the Middle Ages, and were still used as living quarters in a nearby island early last century. It is as difficult to ascertain the age of burial mounds and middens in Ireland as it is of stone houses, because they too were formed over several historical periods. Burial mounds of earth and stone, termed respectively tumuli and cairns by archeologists, first were erected during the Copper-Bronze Age and continued to be built into the early modern period (although not for funerary purposes). There are numerous mounds in Inis Beag, but in many instances it is hard to distinguish on sight cairns from *clochán* in their ruinous, overgrown condition. The islanders regard both types of structures as burial sites. Middens can be dated from the Mesolithic to the end of the medieval era. Most of the island middens are associated with dwelling places from the Middle Ages, but those located near the mouths of caves in the limestone cliffs of the terraces

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16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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male but sometimes female. Also, the former occupied a higher prestige position than the latter, but there was not the clear-cut distinction between genres appropriate to each type of narrator as elsewhere in Ireland; the *seanchaí* sometimes related the exploits of Finn and the *scéalaí* the pranks of the red man. The two surviving storytellers in 1960 were both old men, but the *seanchaí* died in 1963 and the *scéalaí* two years later. Both had been prolific contributors to Irish Folklore Commission collectors and Continental folklorists.

All of the above kinds of folklore expression, with the exception of folktales, were regarded as true by island folk in the past. The myths either coexisted or were reinterpreted with Biblical stories, and the legends were synchronized with events of ancient world history dating from just before the Flood to the eighth century. The Inis Beag *scéalaí* sometimes was derided by school children for still believing his narratives to be true, as was the *seanchaí* for claiming that the supernatural happenings described in his tales actually were experienced by islanders in the past century. Both narrators for many years had been visited only by folklorists and tourists wishing to hear them relate their repertoires of stories, for the only form of storytelling which has been perpetuated is the occasional gathering of men in a home or pub to exchange anecdotes, mostly related to fishing. I was told that in his prime the *scéalaí* could have recited narratives nightly for "at least a month" without ever repeating a story, had he ever been called on to do so. That the memory of the esteemed narrator is prodigious is revealed in the complete collection of all the material recorded from a single *scéalaí* of Co. Kerry, reported by Delargy, which included 396 pages of text: 186 tales, a few songs and song fragments, and various smaller items of prose and verse. These had been obtained from 27 different sources by the narrator, all of whom save one were neighbors (Delargy 1945:11).

Most liked by the folk were the prose narratives related by the *scéalaí* and tales of recent and contemporary historical events in the region, stories of the supernatural in Inis Beag, and personal experiences told by the *seanchaí*. Few of the stories dealt with historical occurrences in Ireland between the coming of Christianity and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and none of them concerned personages or happenings associated with the church. At my request, the *seanchaí* read three books of Irish folklore that I had brought with me—J. J. Campbell's *Legends of Ireland*, Jeremiah Curtin's *Irish Folk-Tales*, and Eileen O'Faolain's *Irish Sagas and Folk-Tales*—and declared that he had heard all of the stories therein as a youth from his father and other island storytellers. However, the versions in the books often were "incorrect," he claimed, and he delighted in "correcting" them; of course, there are many variants of each tale (as many as 527—Aarne-Thompson type 300 in the archives of the Irish Folklore Commission), and he regarded the Inis Beag stories as the legitimate variants. Most of the local and Irish tales share types (plots) and motifs (incidents, characters, and objects) with those of European and other societies brought about by millennia of diffusion, but the Irish have refashioned these elements in their own corpus according to their culture and personality dispositions.

I will not discuss the various prose narratives told by the *scéalaí* of Inis Beag; the greater number of them can be obtained from Campbell or O'Faolain or Sean O'Sullivan's recent Folktales of Ireland.